United Nations A/60/PV.93

General Assembly

Sixtieth session

Official Records

93rd plenary meeting
Friday, 7 July 2006, 5.05 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Eliasson ..... (Sweden)

The meeting was called to order at 5.05 p.m.

Reports of the Fifth Committee

The President: The General Assembly will consider the reports of the Fifth Committee on agenda item 46 together with items 118, 120, 122, 124, 128, 129 and 136, and agenda item 122.

If there is no proposal under rule 66 of the rules of procedure, I shall take it that the General Assembly decides not to discuss the reports of the Fifth Committee that are before it today.

It was so decided.

The President: Statements will therefore be limited to explanations of vote or position. The positions of delegations regarding the recommendations of the Fifth Committee have been made clear in the Committee and are reflected in the relevant official records.

May I remind members that, under paragraph 7 of decision 34/401, the General Assembly agreed that

> "When the same draft resolution is considered in a Main Committee and in plenary meeting, a delegation should, as far as possible, explain its vote only once, i.e., either in the Committee or in plenary meeting, unless that delegation's vote in the plenary meeting is different from its vote in the Committee".

May I remind delegations that, also in accordance with General Assembly decision 34/401, explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Before we begin to take action on the recommendations contained in the reports of the Fifth Committee, I should like to advise representatives that we are going to proceed to take decisions in the same manner as was done in the Fifth Committee, unless notified otherwise in advance. I therefore hope that we may proceed to adopt without a vote those recommendations that were adopted without a vote in the Fifth Committee.

Agenda items 46, 118, 120, 122, 124, 128, 129 and 136 (*continued*)

Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields

United Nations reform: measures and proposals

Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit

Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations

Programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

06-42087 (E)

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations

Human resources management

Administrative and budgetary aspects of the financing of the United Nations peacekeeping operations

Report of the Fifth Committee (A/60/831/Add.1)

The President: The Assembly has before it a draft resolution recommended by the Fifth Committee in paragraph 6 of its report. The text of the draft resolution, for the time being, is contained in document A/C.5/60/L.67.

The Assembly will now take a decision on the draft resolution, which is entitled "Investing in the United Nations: for a stronger Organization worldwide: detailed report". The Fifth Committee adopted the draft resolution without a vote. May I take it that the Assembly wishes to do the same?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution 60/283).

The President: I shall now give the floor to those delegations wishing to explain their positions on the resolution just adopted.

Mr. Wallace (United States of America): We have before us a document that authorizes implementation of a number of proposed measures recommended by the Secretary-General in his detailed report on investing in the United Nations (A/60/692). These changes, while long overdue, represent positive first steps towards the achievement of the types of Secretariat and management reforms agreed to by world leaders during the September 2005 summit and reflected in the outcome document (resolution 60/1). They will only have value, however, if they are implemented in a timely and cost-effective manner and if they are accompanied by additional reforms that are well known now to all Member States.

The United States appreciates the dedication and hard work of representatives in negotiating the proposal before us. While we support the individual elements and look forward to their effective implementation, we believe at the same time that critical elements are still missing. We do not understand why, after agreement to confidence-building measures — and all of us working together to create a positive spirit in the Fifth Committee over the last week — we still do not have a resolution that reflects reforms that we all know are fundamental and reasonable.

The section on oversight provides little in the way of concrete action to improve oversight, merely pushing down the road the consideration of improvements that should be enacted now. Chief among them is the need to ensure operational independence from the Secretariat for the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS). In order for OIOS to operate effectively and provide Member States with information for their decision-making, the auditors and investigators need to be independent of those that they audit and investigate. To not provide that independence now, when all of us know it is needed, is short-sighted and, ultimately, damaging of the Organization's own credibility.

Another key deficiency is in the area of procurement reform. While the resolution grants a small amount of resources to begin badly needed improvements in the inadequate purchasing functions of the United Nations, the conditional and temporary nature of the authorization leaves us doubtful as to whether the United Nations can quickly and decisively repair this activity. We wonder, for example, what qualified procurement officers would be willing to take temporary jobs with the United Nations knowing that their longer-term status is so uncertain. That is clearly another area where Member States can, and should, act decisively. We regret that the resolution does not reflect such an approach.

Lastly, while we firmly believe in the need for the United Nations to have a senior information technology officer to guide the Organization in updating its critical infrastructure for the future, we also believe that that post should be financed through resources that have already been approved. We simply do not understand why, in a $4 billion biennial budget, there are not savings and efficiencies to provide for that position. We continue to believe that savings from a review of mandates and other reforms would be more than sufficient to finance this and other required Secretariat improvements.

Our commitment to reform remains strong and sharply focused, and we look forward to working with others to carry out the revolutionary reform that Secretary of State Rice called for just last year.

Mr. Maqungo (South Africa): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of 77 and China following the adoption of the draft resolution contained in the report of the Fifth Committee (A/60/831/Add.1), on "Investing in the United Nations: for a stronger Organization worldwide".

When we take stock of our follow-up on the decisions of our world leaders contained in the Summit outcome document (resolution 60/1), we can look back with pride in that we have already established the Human Rights Council and the Peacebuilding Commission and have agreed on a resolution on development. Today we have managed to agree on large elements of management reform, as we did in December and April as well.

The adoption of today's resolution follows shortly after the collective agreement by Member States, on 30 June 2006, to lift the spending cap that was imposed on the Organization in 2005. The consensus decision to lift the spending cap ensured the continued financial solvency of the United Nations. It has also lifted the unfortunate cloud of doubt that has been hanging over the Organization and has improved the atmosphere by putting us on the right path to re-establishing the trust among Member States that is needed to reach consensus decisions.

Although it was regrettable that a few Member States were not able to join the consensus on 30 June 2006, we appreciate the assurance given that that would not prevent them from meeting their financial obligations to the United Nations as enshrined in the Charter. We are further encouraged that all Member States were able to join consensus today in adopting resolution 60/283.

By adopting this resolution, Member States have collectively pronounced themselves in a very positive manner on the proposals that the Secretary-General submitted to the Fifth Committee for its consideration less than three weeks ago regarding strengthening the ability of the Organization to effectively fulfil its mandate. Member States have shown that we are able to reach consensus on important reform elements not because of the threat of the spending cap or the discipline that some argued that cap might instil, but because we are committed to strengthening the Organization.

By respecting the existing mechanisms for negotiations and the sovereign right of every Member State to pronounce itself on budgetary and administrative matters, as well as by making a greater effort to understand the views and concerns held by others and not dismissing them outright, we were able to adopt this resolution by consensus. Member States were also able, for the first time ever, to reach consensus on the aspect of limited discretion in budgetary implementation, which had proven to be a very divisive issue in previous negotiations. In an attempt to reach consensus and resolve a previously divisive matter in a constructive way, the Group of 77 and China submitted a concrete proposal on the issue of limited discretion. We further revised it after consultations with other Member States, and we are encouraged that that facilitated the negotiations and enabled the Committee to reach agreement on the proposal. We have been assured by the Secretariat that the decision of the Assembly on this issue will provide the Secretary-General with a greater ability to meet the evolving needs of the Organization while maintaining the integrity of the budget process and ensuring that the programmes approved by Member States are fully implemented.

We wish to recognize the constructive contribution made by our negotiating partners in reaching a consensus decision.

Member States can feel proud of our achievements, reflected in the text that we have just adopted. Among other things, the resolution paves the way for the Secretariat to move towards the adoption of new accounting standards, which the Secretary-General felt were needed to strengthen financial management practices in the Secretariat. By adopting the new standards, the General Assembly is sending a positive signal to the remaining entities of the United Nations system. It is thereby also enabling them to work together towards having a more transparent accounting system in place by 2010.

Furthermore, the resolution approves the request by the Secretary-General for a more up-to-date information communication technology system by replacing the present system with an integrated enterprise-resources planning system or another appropriate solution. That is a key component for the

successful and expeditious implementation of the new accounting standards, as well as for improving interconnectivity between the various United Nations offices in New York, Nairobi, Geneva and Vienna, and the regional economic commissions and peacekeeping operations.

Member States should therefore be ready to act on the future requests of the Secretary-General to strengthen the information and communication technologies system by providing the necessary additional resources that would be needed for the implementation of those proposals. Without such a tangible commitment, we stand the risk of supporting reform in name only.

Another important element that will ensure the success of the significant monetary investments that Member States are expected to make over the next few years so as to improve the information and communication technologies system is the decision of the Assembly to establish a Chief Information Technology Officer in the Office of the Secretary-General. The Group of 77 and China supported providing the requisite resources for that important post. The Secretariat repeatedly stated that it would not be able to fulfil that crucial function if it had to find the resources through redeployment. Any decision not to provide additional resources would have undermined the future success of the collective efforts to improve the information and communication technologies system. Clearly, the suggestion that this function be met from within existing resources was not a feasible option.

The resolution we have just adopted also approves an increase in the level of the Working Capital Fund. That increase has been long overdue. Although the Group of 77 and China were supportive of the request by the Secretary-General to increase the level to an amount higher than the $150 million approved in the resolution, we were willing to settle for a lower amount in order to ensure that the Committee could reach consensus on that matter.

The resolution further contains agreement on a policy on public access to United Nations documents and a prototype of the proposed annual report.

The General Assembly at its sixty-first session will receive the findings of the external evaluation of audit and oversight, as well as the comprehensive governance review. During the world summit, Member States agreed that those findings would form the basis for our future consideration of the issue of operational independence of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, as well as the terms of reference for the Independent Audit Advisory Committee.

It was therefore regrettable that those elements, which were not before the General Assembly at this stage, were brought into our negotiations on the present resolution. Attempts to change the consensus agreements that were reached in September and December 2005, as well as in April 2006, on the necessity for an external evaluation have not been productive and we trust that they will not be repeated. However, in an attempt to reach consensus, the Group of 77 and China and other Member States have put forward proposals to place on record our political commitment to strengthening oversight.

Similarly, and without the benefit of any formal request before us, we have proposed that resources be provided to the Secretary-General to strengthen the internal controls of the United Nations procurement system and to develop programmes for business seminars in developing countries. We have been assured that this will be sufficient until Member States are able to consider the actual requests of the Secretary-General based on the reports that will be placed before the Committee at the sixty-first session. We are encouraged that this proposal has enjoyed wide support, but regret that an agreement on such an important issue was not unanimous.

The Group of 77 and China remain committed to efforts to strengthen the United Nations and enable it to implement its mandates more effectively and use its resources more efficiently. We are also committed to providing the Organization with sufficient resources to meet the mandates bestowed upon it, as well as our share of the additional resources that may be needed to finance approved reform proposals. We therefore believe that it was crucial, in the resolution adopted today, for Member States to pledge their commitment to providing the United Nations with adequate funding, as supports for reform in the Organization should also entail a willingness to fund such proposals. We furthermore remain committed to meeting our financial obligations on time, in full and without conditions.

Member States at the next session of the Assembly will receive and consider the remaining proposals that we have requested in resolution 60/260.

including measures to ensure greater accountability in the Secretariat and to Member States. We expect that the Secretariat will implement the provisions of that resolution fully, as respect for General Assembly resolutions is part and parcel of our efforts to strengthen accountability. General Assembly resolution 60/260 provides the departure point for any action that the Assembly will take in future on the proposals of the Secretary-General.

In that vein, the five reports of the Secretary-General, which we have acted on today, have been submitted in accordance with the provisions of resolution 60/260, which some Member States in May 2006 argued would delay the consideration of the proposals of the Secretary-General. We trust that this question has been laid to rest once and for all and that we will be able to continue to move beyond rhetoric.

In conclusion, we wish to pay tribute to the coordinator of this important item, Mr. Seyed Morteza Mirmohammed, for his efforts in ensuring that the Fifth Committee was able to reach a consensus agreement on the reports of the Secretary-General on investing in the United Nations. We also wish to thank the numerous Secretariat officials who have been working tirelessly over the past few weeks to provide Member States with the information needed to facilitate our decision-making.

The President: I am gratified by the adoption this afternoon of the resolution "Investing in the United Nations: for a stronger Organization worldwide", as recommended by the Fifth Committee. That is an important step on the path to implementing what our leaders asked us to do in the field of Secretariat and management reform at the 2005 world summit.

I am particularly pleased by the constructive atmosphere that prevailed during the difficult negotiations of the Fifth Committee over the past three days. I commend all the members of the Committee for working tirelessly to find compromise solutions to the complex issues in the resolution we have just adopted. While I note that, in some areas, the resolution does not fully meet the concerns of all delegations, I am glad to note that it was adopted by consensus.

By the adoption of the resolution, the General Assembly has requested the Secretary-General fully to operationalize the ethics Office. It has emphasized the need to strengthen accountability in the Organization. It has decided to establish the post of Chief Information Technology Officer at the level of Assistant Secretary-General. It has decided to replace the Integrated Management Information System with a next-generation enterprise resource planning system. It has decided to authorize the Secretary-General, on an experimental basis, a limited discretion for budgetary implementation to enter into commitments up to $20 million in 2006-2007 and 2008-2009. That would enable the Secretary-General to meet the evolving needs of the Organization. That experiment will be reviewed at the sixty-fourth session. It has decided to approve the adoption by the United Nations of the International Public Sector Accounting Standards. It has resolved that the Working Capital Fund for 2006-2007 shall be increased from $100 million to $150 million, effective from 1 January 2007. It has taken note of the intention of the Secretary-General to prepare a single comprehensive annual report containing financial and programme information aimed at enhancing transparency in the Organization, and it has authorized the Secretary-General to enter into commitments up to $700,600 to strengthen the procurement system, pending action by the General Assembly at the sixty-first session on the report of the Secretary-General on procurement reform.

The resolution also looks forward to the results of the independent external evaluation of the audit and oversight system, to two proposals on ensuring the full operational independence of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, as well as to taking action on the terms of reference of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee with a view to operationalizing it.

As to the future work on management reform, the Assembly decided to defer to its sixty-first session the question of consolidation of peacekeeping accounts and increases in the peacekeeping reserve fund. Furthermore, at the coming session, the Assembly will consider proposals of the Secretary-General on governance, oversight and accountability; human resources management; procurement; and administration of justice.

By the decision today, we have contributed to the strengthening of the United Nations. Together we have taken a step to make the Organization more efficient and effective. We have begun consolidating a culture of accountability, transparency and integrity in the Secretariat. The General Assembly has also pledged to provide the United Nations with adequate resources on a timely basis to implement its mandates.

It is my sincere hope that the cooperative atmosphere experienced the last few days will prevail and have a positive influence on the continued work on mandate review. Next week, my two co-Chairs, Permanent Representative Akram of Pakistan and Permanent Representative Cooney of Ireland, intend to initiate discussions on the way forward. I urge the Assembly to support the co-Chairs in this important endeavour.

It remains now only for me to thank each and every one of you for the determination and stamina with which you have worked to achieve these results. Your collective efforts have now provided the Organization with the first measures to put in place mechanisms to respond to the visions of our leaders to make this an efficient, effective and accountable Organization.

I want to pay tribute to the tireless efforts of the Chairman of the Committee, Permanent Representative Ashe, and his very able staff, and, of course, to the skilful work of Mr. Morteza Mirmohammad of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the coordinator of the informal consultations of the Fifth Committee on management reform. Mr. Mirmohammad dedicated his days and nights, literally, to ensure the adoption of the draft resolution on this important issue to the satisfaction of all Member States. I thank him wholeheartedly, and I thank all the colleagues in the Fifth Committee.

I shall make a few general remarks later on the remaining reform issues.

Agenda item 122 (*continued*)

Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations

Report of the Fifth Committee (A/60/609/Add.3)

The President: The Assembly has before it a draft decision recommended by the Fifth Committee in paragraph 5 of its report. The text of the draft decision, for the time being, is contained in document A/C.5/60/L.64.

We will now take action on the draft decision, which is entitled "Questions deferred for future consideration". The Fifth Committee adopted the draft decision without a vote. May I take it that the Assembly wishes to do the same?

The draft decision was adopted.

The President: The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 122 and has thus concluded its consideration of all the reports of the Fifth Committee.

Before adjourning this meeting, I would like to inform members that the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel, which delegates know we agreed upon in December last year, is open for signature. I encourage Member States that have not yet done so to sign this Optional Protocol at the Treaty Section of the Office of Legal Affairs.

I have just a few words and brief observations on the reform process as a whole during the sixtieth session of the General Assembly and what remains on the agenda. The Assembly has taken some significant decisions during its sixtieth session. The establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission and of the Human Rights Council, as was mentioned earlier, are just a few, but important, examples. To make institutional reform is usually a very complicated operation. I commend you for the constructive spirit in which we could finalize that work. I would like to express my gratitude to you for the constructive spirit in which you have worked to implement the mandate given to us from the World Summit.

There are still weeks ahead of us for continued work. I hope we shall make progress on some of the outstanding issues. We have, for instance, the General Assembly revitalization issues and, as you know, we also have a debate on 20 July on Security Council reform. I know that some delegates will be leaving New York later this month or in August, and I am certain that at the end of August, when we still have the chance to deal with some important issues, we will attend to that work with vigour and determination to finish our important tasks.

Among other things, we need to finalize the resolution on reform of the Economic and Social Council. That is important for the strengthening of the social and economic issues within the United Nations. I also hope that we will be in a position to adopt a United Nations counter-terrorism strategy, thereby strengthening international cooperation and coordination to combat this scourge.

I would like to conclude by thanking you all for good work. I look forward to finalizing the remaining reform issues before the end of this session. Delegates will receive a letter later today or over the weekend in which I will spell out in greater detail the remaining items on the agenda. I again want to thank delegates for hard work. I hope that you will have some rest during the summer, but you also know that we will all come back to finish the work and, by that, do as much as possible to implement the Outcome document and thereby follow what our leaders wanted us to do in September of last year. By this, I thank you again for heroic work in many instances and I wish delegates a pleasant weekend.

The meeting rose at 5:35 p.m.